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ABSTRACT

The need for ethnicity to be recognized and accepted by American society is discussed in terms of the inequalities in American education with regard to ethnic children. Positive aspects and limitations of two educational approaches, Black Studies and the Bilingual Program, aimed at the amelioration of social needs caused by poverty, discrimination or cultural disadvantages are detailed. It is suggested that, while focus on racial minority groups and Mexican Americans is fully justified, there is a similar great need for extending these programs to white ethnic groups. (Author/SHM)

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THE ROLE OF ETHNIC STUDIES IN EDUCATIONAL EQUALITY

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THE ROLE OF ETHNIC STUDIES IN EDUCATIONAL EQUALITY

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The idea of equal general education is not exactly new. After all, it was already discussed by Plato - somewhat later during the Reformation - still later during the French Revolution - actually introduced in Germany at the beginning of the nineteenth century and, finally, generally adopted in the civilized world by the middle of the nineteenth century. And the subject of ethnic studies was a popular political issue in Europe and South Asia at the beginning of this century.

In the United States, the principles of public support and state responsibility in education were, in the main, already recognized and implemented by most of the states around the middle of the nineteenth century. The main theme of American educational policies after the Revolution centered around the ideas of freedom, equality and democracy. The principles of government resting upon the consent of the governed called for an enlightened and responsible citizenry. The incorporation of the waves of immigrants arriving from the Old World, with their various cultural and social backgrounds, called for a common language to facilitate communication and to maintain social order; it called also for equalizing principles, rewarding individual abilities and de-emphasizing Old World social class concepts or national origins.

Thus, though the Constitution does not mention education, the ideas of equal educational opportunities took hold and were implemented through a general public educational system. Public support, state control and freedom from sectarianism were the three main objectives of the new American

educational system, formulated in the nineteenth century. However, private schools, sponsored mainly by denominational and ethnic groups, were not forbidden and continued to exist and to develop.

Through emphasis on common language and good citizenship, the public schools became primary agents for fostering unity in American society. But with time, and particularly during the periods of intensive Americanization before World War II, the positive emphasis on unity through language and laws became a vehicle of the assimilationist and melting pot theories, emphasizing repression of cultural differences. Ideas of unity of language and law became policies of cultural nationalism(1) thoroughly implemented by the educational system through its curricula, textbooks and teacher training.

Meanwhile, however, the principle of equal educational opportunities broke down on the issue of education for the Blacks. The historical sequence of the often reluctant provision of education for the Blacks after the Civil War, and the establishment of the segregationist principle of 'separate but equal', to the decision of the Supreme Court in 1954 in which segregation in schools was declared "inherently a denial of equality of educational opportunity and thus prohibited by the fourteenth amendment to the U.S. Constitution" is well known. And we all are witnesses of the final act of the desegregation of the American public school system, which only began with the Black revolution in the sixties and continues to be one of the major problems of the nation.

At the same time other racial groups, and mainly the Chicanos, raised the problem of handicaps in learning experienced by their children who, speaking Spanish at home, have great difficulties in following the demands of the

public school curriculum.

In response to these always existing but newly surfaced social needs caused by poverty, discrimination or cultural disadvantages, a number of new programs and approaches were developed, aimed at the amelioration of these needs. Two of these - the Black studies, and the Bilingual Program, are most relevant to our subject:

Black Studies--The phenomenal growth of Black studies over the past few years can only be interpreted as a need strongly felt by the Blacks and recognized by society, if not always spontaneously. In a recent publication on Ethnic Studies in Higher Education published by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, in August 1972(2) 477 colleges are listed as offering Black studies; 141 of these, or over one-third, are programs in Black studies (as major or minor) and sixty nine, or about one-seventh, are degree programs. Some estimates go to as high as four hundred institutions of higher learning offering courses only, and about two hundred offering independent programs in Black Studies.

The emphasis in these courses or programs is on Black history, literature and interdisciplinary courses, in that order. A variety of purposes is being formulated by the various programs and by individual writers, stressing the advantages of Black studies to both the Black population and to the whole society. To the first category belong formulations such as: Opportunity for Blacks to understand their culture and heritage, to explore the social, political and economic approaches for helping Black people, to correct negative self concepts held by Blacks, to develop Black identity, to enhance the Black self concept, to promote cultural aspirations and stimulate creativity of Blacks. On the side of advantages to society, the Black studies are to

increase understanding among the races and, consequently, to combat discrimination and prejudice and to reduce racial tensions.(3)

Despite the still ongoing controversy over the quality of these offerings, qualifications of instructors, racial composition of classes, staffing and administrative control, it is generally accepted that Black studies will remain a permanent ingredient of the higher education curriculum, with nearly all educators believing "that the ultimate and ideal way to handle materials on Blacks and other ethnic groups is to weave them into the regular curricula as an integral part of everything that is taught from kindergarten to grade twelve" (4). The emergence of Black studies is also called the most common student-initiated change in the academic curriculum. The impact is said to be greatest on the community college where it "constitutes the most extensive modification of curriculum since addition of vocational-technical courses decades ago." (5)

A large part of the Black studies, and particularly those organized in independent programs are apparently funded from outside sources, mainly foundations, whereas single courses are being absorbed locally, particularly in state colleges and universities.

Though only incomplete information is available on other racial minorities, it is evident that they have been following the example of Black studies both with regard to the expanding of existing programs and to the establishing of new ones. The National Council for Chicano Studies estimates that about a hundred and fifty interdisciplinary academic Chicano programs are offered in institutions of higher education. In addition, twelve Chicano colleges have been formed and are affiliated with accredited institutions. Program offerings are increasing in the Midwest and the Northwest. Similar

increases in course offerings can be assumed in American Indian Studies and other racial minorities (6)

The demand for inclusion of ethnic content is also spreading to the elementary and secondary schools. A number of states already have legislation or policy statements requiring ethnic studies in the elementary and secondary schools. An additional number of states are developing guidelines or adopting resolutions on this subject (7) In result, there is a great need for increased higher education emphasis on training teachers for ethnic studies and for development of multi-ethnic materials (8)

Bilingual Education--The bilingual education program was established under Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (Public Law 89-N) as amended in 1967 (Public Law 90-247) to meet the special educational needs of children who have limited English-speaking ability. In the official definition "Bilingual education means the use of two languages, one of which is English, as mediums of instruction." (9) In the words of the report on the status and operation of ESEA Title VII, fiscal year 1969:

> The program is designed to serve children from low income families who come from environments where the dominant language is other than English. .... Use of the mother tongue as well as English as the mediums of instruction, and the study of the history and culture associated with the child's first language are considered integral parts of bilingual education.(10)
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> . . . . . .
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> Use of the dominant language thus prevents the academic retardation that results if the children are not given any instruction in these subjects until they learn English or if instruction is provided only through an English curriculum. In addition, mastering the language arts of their own languages, especially reading and writing, actually facilitates learning these skills in English after the children have achieved sufficient command of oral English.
>
> Moreover, language is intimately associated with one's concept of self and with feelings of group identity. By accepting and recognizing the home language and by using it for the children's learning experiences, bilingual programs provide a learning environment in which a more favorable self concept may be developed and in which

> successful experiences rather than rejection and failure are the rule.
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> . . . . . .
>
> The law specifies that local educational agencies include in approved projects children who are from environments where English is the dominant language if such participation would enhance the effectiveness of the project. Accordingly, projects have been encouraged to include English speaking children to the greatest extent possible.
>
> Special policies have been developed for projects involving American Indian languages (11)
>
> . . . . . .

The program stresses educational accountability, evaluation and dissemination in the community. The activities of the program are aimed at:

> comprehensiveness in scope, and they deal not only with the academic development of children in pre-school through grade twelve, but also with the education of their parents, the children's personal and social growth, relevant teaching styles and strategies, the working out of bilingual curriculum materials and guides and better home school relationships. (12)

The program also provides for training of teachers and teacher-aides (pre-service and in-service), for the development of instructional materials and for vertical expansion of projects as well as for inclusion of new geographic areas and languages. The long range goals of the bilingual program are best formulated, however, in the Manual for Project Applicants and Grantees:

- Students from the non-English-speaking environment will have an adult literate command of both languages.
- Students from the English-speaking environment will have an adult literate command of both languages.
- Students from the non-English-speaking environment will progress through the school program at the rate commensurate with that of English-speaking students of comparable ability.
- Students from the non-English-speaking environment will feel pride in their language and heritage.
- As great a percentage of those from the non-English-speaking environment as from the English-speaking environment will graduate from high school.

- As great a percentage of students from the non-English-speaking environment as from the English-speaking environment will enter college.

- Students from the non-English-speaking environment who choose not to pursue higher education will have the skills to secure employment in an English-speaking culture.

- All participants will value a multi-cultural society.

- A bilingual staff of teachers and administrators, many from the minority culture, will have developed the attitudes and skills to maintain an effective bilingual program.

- Parents from the non-English-speaking environment will participate as fully in school-related activities as those from the English-speaking environment.(13)

Grants for bilingual education are awarded on a competitive basis through a two-stage submission and approval process consisting of submission and review of preliminary proposals and later of comprehensive plans for the implementation of the proposed program by the selected local educational agencies.

In fiscal year 1969, seven and a half million dollars were appropriated for the Bilingual Education Program, seventysix formal proposals in twentytwo states were finally approved and funded; of these, sixtyeight are designed to serve Spanish-speaking children, five projects to American-Indians, two projects each to Portuguese and Chinese, and one project each to French and Japanese. A total of 26,521 children are participating in the program, representing approximately eight percent of the total number of children with limited English-speaking ability in the target areas. Ninetyfive percent of these children are enrolled in public schools, five percent are enrolled in non-public schools.

In its conclusion, the Report estimates that approximately five

million school age children have limited English-speaking ability and are in dire need of bilingual education. Only twentyseven thousand were served in fiscal year 1969 through the bilingual education projects funded under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Title VII, at a cost of seven and a half million dollars. By projecting the funding to the total number of children, the total cost would be at least $400 million not counting the cost of training of teachers; counting twentyfive students per teacher and $1,000 per teacher for training, the program costs would be increased by $200 million. Together, then, at least $600 million would be needed to provide bilingual education programs to all children in the nation who need them.(14)

It is not known how the estimated number of five million children was arrived at. However, according to the Census Bureau's November 1969 Current Population Report, which included characteristics of the population by ethnic origin, nearly thirtysix million Americans reported their mother tongue (i.e., language reported as spoken at home inchildhood) as non-English, though only twelve million of these reported a non-English language as their "current" language (language reported as the one usually spoken in the home at the time of the survey).(15) It could well be that out of the twelve million, five million or more were children of school age. Even if we assume that a large number of these five million children would be Spanish or French-speaking or Indians, it still would leave a sizeable number--perhaps two and a half million children, or more--with limited English-speaking ability.

Who are these children? They come mainly from the homes of the foreign born, frequently recent immigrants, mainly Europeans, Latin

Americans with other than Spanish backgrounds, and Asians. They may also come from closely knit ethnic communities, such as Chinese, Japanese or other Asian ethnic communities, but also from groups of European origin such as Italians, Greeks, Poles, Ukrainians, etc. A recent survey in one of the Chicago schools with an enrollment of 1,018 children discovered that the first language of 263 children was Greek.(16)

However, most of these children will not get the needed assistance because of either too low concentration in one school area or because their families have a slightly higher than the prescribed income limit. In any case, the Bilingual Act excludes all those children from ethnic groups who come from homes whose "current language" may be English--at least as officially reported--but who may also use their mother tongue at home and who also would greatly need bilingual instructions to prevent their academic retardation, and some study of their heritage to provide them with a learning environment "in which a more favorable self concept may be developed and in which successful experiences rather than rejection and failure are the rule." (17).

And furthermore, the Bilingual Act does not include all those coming from families who, though English is exclusively spoken, still identify themselves with their ethnic origins and who would be interested in the history and culture of their ancestors and benefit from it, both in their personal development and, most likely, also in their learning efficiency.

It is because of these limitations that the Act is considered as not fulfilling its implicit promise of a basic change in "language policy" from an earlier intolerant tradition of assimilation to a new trend of

favoring ethnic language maintenance and cultural pluralism. In addition, it is asserted that an analysis of the programs funded under the Act shows that most of them are aimed directly at assimilation through ethnic language shift rather than at the proclaimed program goals. Some describe it as being nothing more than a "disguised" assimilation program.

However, despite these shortcomings of the Act regarding its eligibility provisions and its implementation, it provides a verbal formulation which, if made universally applicable and if properly implemented, could benefit ethnic American, if not all American, children.

According to the abovementioned Bureau of Census survey, seventy-five million Americans identified themselves in 1969 with one of the seven specific origins constituting the largest ethnic groups in the United States. Counting all those under "others" (53.3% of the population) who identified themselves with the remaining seventy-odd ethnic origins existing in the United States, we may well come up with a much larger figure, even if we subtract all those who have no interest whatsoever in any bilingual program, either due to their lack of identification or perhaps unwillingness to identify with any ethnic origin.

But ethnic origin does not necessarily mean ethnic identification. In fact, we know very little about the ethnics in our society and their identification with their backgrounds. Origin is probably one of the most decisive factors, though even origin can be a controversial matter subject to ideological and situational factors as, for instance, was the case with pre-World War I immigrants from the Austrian, Russian and

German states. Participation in ethnic life, involvement in group functions and, finally, conscious commitment, are probably the best indices of the dimensions of ethnic identification but these will hardly be assessed by a census survey.

Most important, however, from the point of view of educational needs and equal opportunities is the attitude of society towards ethnic backgrounds and cultural differences in general. Two hundred years of absorption ideologies, whether of the assimilation brand or the melting pot denomination, have conditioned the relational climate in American society and have left deep wounds, of which the recent racial unrest is only the most extreme and the most visible expression. In the final analysis, it can be asserted that it was this absorptionist ideology which divided Americans into those recognized as meltable and who were admitted to the melting pot and those who were not admitted. In other words it was a division into those who could have hope to "make it" and become indistinguishable in American society, and share in its prosperity, and those who were condemned to life without hope. It was this division that brought about the conditions for the Black revolution as the only means to break out of the vicious encirclement of dehumanization and hopelessness.

However, the conditions among the "meltables" were not ideal either. Strict ranking by their perceived "social distance" from the dominating groups was accompanied often by overt and covert, explicit and implicit prejudice and discrimination. Through crude and subtle ethnic slurs and jokes, through slights in personal relations, in public life and especially by means of the mass media, an atmosphere

was created which pressured towards conformity to a generalized abstract personality model, and which often compelled--and still compels--children of ethnic families to reject their parents, refuse to speak the language they learned in childhood at home, and to dis-associate themselves from the ethnic communities in which they grew up.

The most critical moment for the ethnic child occurs when he first enters school. He suddenly realizes that his cultural background has little value in the outside world. At best, he hears little if anything about it. Soon he learns that his background may be a handicap to him, to his personal development and to his future. This may be conveyed to him not so much by the teacher, but by his peers who transmit in their daily interaction the various reactions of the adult world to them. Here is what a girl from Maine writes about her childhood school experiences.

> I grew up in a New England city where French, Irish and Old English families held a tight, economic and social control over the community. The few Polish and Lithuanian families living there had to be content with menial, poor-paying jobs and endure the condescension of their neighbors. Some of the children were as biased as their parents; they mocked and scoffed at our Slavic ancestry openly in their loud clear voices. Our teachers were impatient with our long names and constantly misspelled and mispronounced them.
> I grew up restrained and mouselike, dreading to make any movement or noise that would call attention to myself. Only the warmth of our family life made the harsh attitude of the community and the cold, unfriendly winters during those depressing years bearable.
> My fifth grade history teacher was an elderly woman .... One day this cool, aloof teacher, mentioned casually (we had been studying the American Revolutionary War for some weeks) that two Polish patriots had come to America to help in the struggle for freedom. (She) said that she thought it was quite wonderful that they had come such a long distance to help and that it was a very generous gesture. ....
> I sat stunned. Unbelievingly, I absorbed the information and committed it to memory. It was the first time I had heard something favorable about Poles, spoken in English.... I felt proud and happy and a little sad because I knew that this wonderful moment would soon be over.(18)

In a metropolitan university where I taught for several years and where most of the students were of ethnic origin, I found a high correlation between the ethnicity of the students and their unwillingness to speak up in class. Those with the strongest ethnicity were also the last ones to admit their background, even if the subject of ethnicity was discussed. In private conversations and conferences most of them had similar stories to that of the girl mentioned above regarding their experiences in elementary and high school. Similar experiences are recounted by most ethnic adults. The message that the school conveyed was very clear. To be a fullfledged American one should forget one's background, one's language, and one's grandparents. Fishman, writing on child indoctrination for minority-group membership thus describes the ethnic child in the school:

> The assumptions posit a compelling American core culture, toward which the minority-group child has ambivalent feelings. He is attracted to it, surrenders willingly to it, desires to participate fully in it. The imperfect congruence between his aspirations and the possibility of his being absorbed generates ambivalence whenever he is rejected. Nevertheless, the minority-group child is ever ready to swallow his pride and try once more.(19)

Numerous studies and articles have repeatedly referred to this aspect of American education. Though most of these, particularly during the last decade, focussed on the Blacks, Mexicans and other racial minorities, quite a few of them refer to white ethnic groups. They deal with phenomena such as the persistence of ethnic patterns(20) the significance of ethnicity to self concept, to behavior, and in social and personal disorganization,(21) language maintenance and group maintenance related to social maladjustment(22) and ethnicity and school

adjustment and achievements,[23] etc.

To conclude, it is asserted here that there still exists a great deal of inequality in American education with regard to ethnic children. It is further asserted that while the focus on racial minority groups and Mexican-Americans is fully justified, there is a similar great need for extending these programs to white ethnic groups and that, though no direct comparison can be made to the experiences of the Blacks in particular, there is a psychological similarity in experiences of white ethnic groups which calls for attention and for remedial action through the schools.

The Black Studies and the Bilingual Program which were discussed at length at the beginning of this paper with regard to both their positive aspects and their limitations, have also their direct application to the needs of the white ethnic groups. Perhaps a combination of both these programs should be made universally available not only to those in need of it for their self development and their motivation for learning, but rather to all American children disregarding their identification with any specific ethnic background. All evidence seems to confirm that such intercultural experience in school is highly beneficial to the development of personal identity, to interpersonal effectiveness and to communicative abilities of children.

While the merits of a culturally pluralistic framework for American society with regard to both its form and content, can be discussed, the reality of American society and culture as being ethnically and racially diversified cannot be denied.

This reality has recently been recognized by Congress in the passage of the Ethnic Heritage Program of the educational amendments of 1972 which, though not funded, as the administration did not ask for any of the authorized $15 million funds, still remains a document representing a decision b y the representatives of the nation and a source for reference. The Bill essentially provides two fundamental precepts which have to be recognized as the cornerstones of any work in the field of ethnic studies:

1. The American society is a pluralistic society historically and contemporaneously.
2. Cultural pluralism, if properly understood and implemented, is essentially positive, constructive and conducive to higher human development and achievements.

The Bill provides four definite criteria for activities including development and dissemination of curriculum materials, providing training for teachers and cooperation with community. The Bill may be introduced again by Senator Schweiker its previous sponsor, and may eventually pass again and, perhaps, even be funded for 1974.

Meanwhile, however, the problem of ethnic studies is not dormant. As mentioned previously, a number of states and communities have adopted measures, introduced either by the state legislatures, by Local Boards of Education, or by mandates issued by State Superintendents. Some of the state or local school systems have already made considerable progress in curricular and methodological developments of ethnic studies. Much remains to be done. There is also a great need for research, not only on the educational aspects of ethnicity but also on American ethnicity

itself. It is most important, however, that ethnicity be recognized and accepted by the American society as part of its reality and that, consequently, ethnic studies would be accepted and recognized, not just as an expressed need of any particular ethnic group but as a need of all Americans, disregarding their background, to know and understand themselves and each other and to achieve unity and social peace.

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